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SUBJECT: Jordan's Environmental Priorities: Environmental
Economist, Park Rangers, Waste

Ref: A) Amman 5907

B) Amman 3358

1. Summary: Minister of Environment Khaled Irani renewed his interest in hosting an EPA environmental economist under the Science Fellows program. He also seeks National Park Service assistance in creating a park ranger corps for Jordan. An EU-sponsored capacity building project at the Ministry will start soon. The EU's preliminary report on the Ministry led to a reorganization along functional lines that created units for policy, information and monitoring, and inspection. End summary.

Priorities Have Been Set

2. A/DCM, ESTHoff and AIDOff paid a call on a typically buoyant and positive Minister of Environment Khaled Irani on August 16 to discuss bilateral and regional programs, and to learn about the Ministry of Environment's (MOE) plans. Irani's first priority has been creating a focus and a mission for his ministry (ref B), and the structure to support that mission. He said that an 18-month EU-sponsored capacity building project at the MOE is now out for bids, and that he expects a decision in October on the winner.

3. The EU project meshes nicely with Irani's arrival in April 2005 as Minister. Irani said that he had recently had a successful retreat for his top staff and department heads to identify MOE priorities. Those priorities can be fed into the EU project so that capacity is developed in priority areas. Irani said that he is reorganizing the MOE along functional lines, including new divisions for policy development, information and monitoring systems, and inspections.

Science Fellows to Meet Key Needs in Finance, Waste

4. ESTHoff told Minister Irani that post's request for Science Fellows to advise the MOE on environmental economics, industrial waste management and solid waste management (Ref A) was being processed in Washington by State and EPA. Irani renewed his ministry's strong desire for an environmental economist (Ref B). He also asked later about American programs to tax or recycle plastic shopping bags, a modern plague in Jordan.

5. Solid and hazardous waste management are two other important areas for Jordan that (Ref A) Science Fellows will assist in. ESTHoff mentioned the arrival on August 21 of a Department of Energy team to evaluate physical security of nuclear materials at Jordan's Swaqa hazardous waste site. Irani responded by noting the importance of Jordan developing a comprehensive plan, perhaps with the help of the Science Fellows, for Swaqa and by extension for all of Jordan's solid and hazardous waste. He mused that a Build-Operate-Transfer project for Swaqa is the only practical solution for Jordan's hazardous wastes; government "cannot do it alone," he said.

Park Ranger Project - Close to His Heart

6. Irani, formerly head of the the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, an NGO, moved to a subject close to his heart, the development of a national park ranger corps. Irani said he had met that morning with the head of the Public Security Directorate (Jordan's police force) to develop ideas for the rangers. Irani sees the rangers as fulfilling multiple roles in Jordan's forests and parks: enforcing natural resource laws on poaching, polluting, littering and illegal tree-cutting; providing traditional police services such as security and first aid; and acting as interpretive guides.

7. Minister Irani said that the King is interested in and supportive of the ranger program. Irani is well aware that

the mission for these rangers needs to be brought into sharper focus. He said MOE will form a committee with the Ministry of Agriculture (responsible for national forests), the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (national park managers) and with the Public Security Directorate (police) to give shape to the park ranger program.

18. ESTHOff described the U.S. National Park Service's (NPS) International Volunteers in Parks (IVIP) program to Minister Irani, who was very interested. The IVIP program arranges typically 2-4 month working visits by foreigners, including students and government officials, to get a hands-on look at operations in the U.S. National Park system. Visitors pay their own way to the United States, and the hosting park provides housing. Any salary would continue to be paid by the sending country. ESTHOff also pointed out requirements for insurance and a J-1 visa, and the fact that these are working visits in sometimes difficult and remote areas. Irani nodded in assent and joked that the program should be arranged so that the participants "don't have any fun."

19. Irani was so taken with the program that he asked if it would be possible to send three individuals from Jordan. He expressed hopes that the experience would provide a strategic overview of a ranger program that would include administrative and legal aspects in addition to operations. ESTHOff has contacted the International Office of the National Park Service to discuss the possibilities further.

Peace Process Training Programs Planned

10. ESTHOff raised a planned workshop, organized under the Multilateral Peace Process's Working Group on the Environment, to discuss preventing pollution from gasoline stations and petroleum storage devices. Irani was familiar with the proposal and approved, noting that gasoline is part of a larger constellation of hazardous chemicals that Jordan will need to manage better. The workshop, tentatively planned for Israel during the fourth quarter of 2005, will include representatives from Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority.

11. Comment: Irani noted the fact that the fledgling Ministry of Environment was created only in 2003. But with a total staff that could comfortably fit in a Boeing 757, swift change should not be impossible. With Irani settling in at the controls, we're starting to see the Ministry take off, finally.

HENZEL